

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

E. Remarks

Objections to Drawings

The drawings have been amended to address objections raised. In particular, Kanji has
5 been changed to text in Figs. 3 and 4. In addition, the reference “H.P.” has been changed to
“Home Page”.

Objections to the Specification

The Specification has been amended to more clearly demonstrate the technology
10 connection to general theme of the invention.

Rejection of Claim 1 Under 35 U.S.C. §103(a), based on *Clark* (U.S. Patent No. 6,351,738) in
view of *Arnold et al.* (U.S. Patent No. 6,460,072).

The invention of amended claim 1 is directed to a franchise system that includes at least
15 one headquarter network server, a plurality of franchise servers, and a plurality of member
servers. The at least one headquarter network server includes various elements, including
merchandise information memory data, a home page creation system, a home page sending
service, an order receiving system, a received data transfer system, and a franchise store
identification (ID) system.

20 As is well established, to establish a prima facie case of obviousness, a rejection must
meet three basic criteria. First, there must be some suggestion or motivation to modify a
reference or combine reference teachings. Second, there must be a reasonable expectation of
success. Finally, the prior art reference(s) must teach or suggest all claim limitations.

The cited combination of references is not believed to show a home page sending service,
25 as recited in Applicant’s claim 1. Applicant’s home page sending service, which is part of the at
least one headquarter network server, sends home page data for the home page of each franchise
store to at least one predetermined member server. As noted in the Specification such an
arrangement can eliminate the need for a franchise store to maintain its own home page.¹ This is
in sharp contrast to the cited references.

¹ See Applicant’s “clean” Specification, Page 6, Lines 28-29.

Clark remains silent as to home pages, and thus is not believed to show or suggest a home page sending service.

Arnold et al. is directed to a method of purchasing products over the Internet. However, *Arnold et al.* does not include at least one headquarter network server with a home page sending service, as claimed. In *Arnold et al.* “virtual outlets” (VOs) may present good for sale provided by a merchant computer. The merchant computer includes a “virtual outlet home web page component”. However, the merchant computer does not send such information to any customer computer (argued to correspond to Applicant’s member server). As indicated in the reference, it is the VOs computer that sends home page information.

The VO computer 1A10... provides the Web pages of the virtual outlet to customers... The merchant computer 1A11 includes a virtual outlet home Web page component 1A14 that provides an initial Web page to the virtual outlet management component 1A13 of the VO computer 1A10.²

Thus, the reference *Arnold et al.* is believed to be a variation of conventional arrangements where a seller (e.g., VO) computer sends home page data to a consumer. This is unlike Applicant’s arrangement in which a headquarter network server sends home page data (for franchise stores) to a member server.

In addition, or alternatively, the cited combination of references is not believed to show or suggest a received data transfer system. Applicant’s received data transfer system, which is included in the at least one headquarter network server, transfers order data from the at least one headquarter network server to one of the franchise servers.

Clark shows the payment for goods/and services by customers to a franchisees³ as well as a hub business entity (HBE) e-commerce system for transacting electronic commerce⁴. However, neither arrangement teaches the transfer of order data from a headquarter network server to a franchise server.

² See *Arnold et al.*, Col. 7, Lines 14-23.

³ See *Clark*, FIG. 3

⁴ See *Clark*, FIG. 6.

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Arnold et al. is believed to be no more suggestive of Applicants' received data transfer system. In *Arnold et al.*, each VO has to access a merchant computer to acquire consumer information.

5 Although... it may be practical for a... VO to access accounting information from a few merchants, such use becomes impractical as the number of merchants... increases... Consequently, a VO computer... can automatically collect accounting information from each merchant to which the VO has established a relationship. For example... during off hours, download information relating to daily
10 transactions...⁵

Thus, in *Arnold et al.*, VO computers must retrieve transaction data on their own. Transaction data is never transferred to them by a server (e.g., by the received data transfer system of a headquarter network server).

15 Accordingly, because the cited references are not believed to show all limitations of Applicant's amended claim 1, a prima facie case is not believed to have been established, and this ground for rejection is traversed.

Applicant has added dependent claims 2-9, which are believed to present additional
20 patentable features of the invention.

New claim 2 recites that a merchandise information memory data further includes information for goods not available at one of the franchise stores, but available at the headquarter. Such a limitation is not shown in the references. *Clark* does not appear to distinguish location of goods. In *Arnold et al.*, all goods are maintained by merchant stores, the
25 virtual outlet (being virtual) not having any goods at all.

New claim 4 recites that the home page sending service sends predetermined guest home page data when a member server accessing the Franchise System does not match any franchise store. As noted previously, *Clark* is silent as to home pages. However, *Arnold et al.* does not show such a limitation, either. There is no provision for a "guest" home page in *Arnold et al.*, as
30 the system presented does not appear to envision a common relationship between VOs and

⁵ *Arnold et al.*, Col. 6, Lines 45-58, emphasis added.

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merchants, like that which would exist between franchises and a headquarters, as set forth in Applicant's invention.

New claim 5 recites a very particular uniform resource locator (url) value structure. In particular, the url values include a first portion unique to each franchise store and a second portion common to all franchise stores and the headquarters. *Clark* remains silent as to urls, thus cannot show or suggest such an arrangement. *Arnold et al.* provides urls that distinguishes between VOs⁶, but provides no portion common to all franchise stores and the headquarters.

New claims 6-9 recite a member entry data base that can include various data structures for such a data base. Such a feature is not believed to be present in the cited references. *Clark* is silent as to any sort of member data base. *Arnold et al.* does not appear to provide any information for distinguishing consumers in any particular manner.

For all of the above reasons, the present claims 1-9 are believed to be in allowable form. It is respectfully requested that the application be forwarded for allowance and issue.

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⁶ See *Arnold et al.*, Col. 6, Lines 6-22, which indicates a url portion is used to return a customer computer to the original VO web page. There is no portion common to franchise stores and a headquarter.

APPENDIX A

Marked up version of substitute Specification

For Serial No.: 09/608,038
Applicant(s): YOSHIOKA, Tetsuro

SPECIFICATION

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

Network Based Franchise Business System and Method of Retail Stores with Internet

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates generally to systems and methods of electronic commerce, and more particularly to an-regarding electronic shopping system and method of for retail franchisees system by retailers, shall be included in the technical field of the Electronic Commerce (EC) with over a network such as the Internet.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] In various industries-Recently, companies and stores in various industries create virtual stores with by way of their own conventional Hhome Ppages inon the Internet,. Through such conventional home page arrangements, and through them, theythe companies/stores receive purchase orders.

[0003] Incidentally, iIn this type of conventional electronic shopping system, it is very important to create Hhome Ppages; which will be attractive to common consumers and that will be able to stimulate consumers' purchasing desires. Further-more, it is necessary-desirable to present-every-time a variety of goods, enough to satisfy the high and different demands of the consumers.

[0004] Needless to sayUnfortunately, the relative cost required in-order-to create and maintain effective Hhome Ppages and-maintain-them-is-can be much higher for

medium/small sized enterprises or retail shops, -than for ~~big~~large sized companies. The introduction of ~~such a~~systems for presenting/providing individual home pages for medium/small sized enterprises may not be adequately effective ~~is hard for them~~, since the range of the goods to be displayed is limited. Thus, Even if a medium/small sized enterprisethey decides to start the ~~Eean electronic commerce~~ Ssystem on their own, it may be difficult to obtain satisfactory effects.

[0005] In light of the above, it would be desirable to arrive at a~~Therefore, we have~~ thought about the practical franchise system for retailers, such as music records retailers.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] According to the present invention, retailers, such as- ~~M~~music record retailers, ~~shall get together and can be~~ organized together under a Franchise System, ~~which will~~ that establishes thea ~~H~~headquarter for electronic commerce, such as Internet business. ~~Also, the~~Such a H~~headquarter can include~~will set up the ~~Server for Internet a~~ headquarter server (-hereafter, referred to as “-H.-Server”)-. ~~Both~~ Retailer members (e.g., F~~franchise~~ Sstores) may each have their own server (hereafter referred to ~~F~~Server) connected to the ~~H~~Server via a network (e.g., the Internet). ~~and the~~ Members (e.g., potential consumers) collected ~~-by F~~franchise Sstores individually ~~will~~ can each have each- their own Sserver (-hereafter, referred to as “-F.Server” and “-M.-Server” respectively) also connected with H.-Server via the network (e.g., Internet).

[0007] According to the present invention, an H.-Server ~~can include~~shall consist of the following data and systems-;

[0008] Merchandise Information Memory Data, will- ~~be~~that includes gathered ~~ing~~ information ~~efor~~ for various goods (hereafter, referred to as “Goods”) sold by Franchise Stores, such as ~~including~~ records, CD, MD, Music Tape, Video Tape and DVD, etc. ~~which are sold by Franchise Stores-;~~

[0009] a Home Page Creation System, with ~~that~~ can be realized through several ways: ~~the system will be able to~~ and can read the Merchandise Information Memory Data for ~~desired~~and get all the necessary merchandise information-; while ~~At~~ at the same time, collecting each home page data and Franchise Store Identification (ID) data ~~it will be~~

able, through each Franchise Store's Home page Data Memory System particular to each Franchise Store, to collect each Store's Home Page Data, as well as the Franchise Store ID System;

[0010] a Home Page Sending Service, ~~will be used in order to~~ that sends the Home Page, including information, gathered from Merchandise Information Memory Data to the various Franchise Store home pages;

[0011] an Order Receiving System, ~~that will facilitates the realization of orderings from~~ the by Members, through the various Franchise Store Hhome Ppages;

[0012] a Received Data Transfer System, ~~that will enable the transfers of the Order Ddata (received by the Order Receiving System); to the "F.Server" identified by a Member Store ID System.~~ The such order data will be can including the a buyer's name and the ordered items; and

[0013] a Franchise Store (identification) ID System ~~will that facilitates the identification of at the fFranchise sStore to which at the Member (or non-Member)s concerned belongs, including with the time(s) that the Members or non-Members have accessed.~~ The Franchise Store ID System shall identifying the Franchise Store to which thea Member concerned belongs; based on thea uniform resource locator (URL) set up in advance according to the predefined rules.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a system according one embodiment of the present invention, including associated hardware.

[0015] Fig. 2 is a diagram showing one example of a Member Data Base of a system according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0016] Fig. 3 is a diagram showing one example of a Franchise Store Data Base of a system according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0017] Fig. 4 is a diagram showing a Home Page Data Base of a system according to

one embodiment of the present invention.

[0018] Fig. 5 is a flow diagram showing a method according to of a system according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

—————We explain how the Invention is executed as follows;

A-[0019] Fig.ure 1 shows the structure outline of electronic shopping system (hereinafter System 1) concerned with according to one embodiment of the present invention. The System 1 consists of includes a headquarter server (H.-Server) 10 owned by at the Hheadquarter of a Franchise System, franchise servers (F.-Server) 20-20 (only one of which is shown in the Fig.ure 1), owned by one of many the Franchise Stores of the Franchise System-, member servers (M.-Server) 30-30 (only one of which is shown in the Fig.ure 1) owned by the Members associated with collected by the Franchise Stores, and a network (e.g., Internet) 40 connecting all of them.

[0020]B- In H.-Server 10, can be equipped with various Ddata Bbases are equipped. Among the data basesdatabases them, is a Goods Master Data Base 11, is Goods Master in which all merchandise data, such as records/CDs/other goods related with the System, are cataloged. H.Server 10 may also be equipped withThe contents 12-12 are packaged to which classify suchgoods entered into gGoods in Master Data Base 11, into, Such classification can include, for example, a musician group, a music category group and a best sellers group, etc.

[0021]C- H. Server 10 is further be equipped with a Member Entry Data Base 13 is the data base for Member Entry, where the members collected by each memberFranchise sStore in the Franchise System are cataloged. One example of a portion of a Member Entry Data BaseConcretely speaking, as shown in Fig. 2, and designated by the general reference character 13. A Member Entry Data Base 13 can include, for every member, thean identification (ID) Number (No.), a Ppassword, a Franchise Store Ccode, a Branch Code (if the member belongs to thea certain branch of thea Franchise Store), and a Fterminal identification (ID) Code, also called a "Ccookie", which is used by an H. Server 10 to identify if thea member's M.Server 30 arehas been entered into the Member

Entry Data Base 13.

[0022] H.Server 10 also includes a Franchise Store Data Base 14 which can include ~~is the data base for Franchise Store entries.~~ One example of a portion of a Franchise Store Data Base is shown in Fig. 3, and designated by the general reference character 14, as the data for every Franchise Store can be entered into the Franchise Store Data Base 14, including a Store Code and Branch Code (-if any-) are entered. When a the Franchise Agreement has been made between the Store and the Headquarter, such data for the store is cataloged in Franchise Store Data Base 14 of H.-Server 10, to make such a store a Franchise Store of the System 1.

[0023] H.Server 10 may also include a ~~D.~~ Home Page Data Base 15 in which ~~is for entering the Hhome Ppage data of each Franchise Store can be entered.~~ As shown in Fig. 4, for exampleinstance, the Hhome page Data can includeing the store name logos used in creating a Hhome Ppage, Figures for the Hhome Ppages, and a branch List for a Franchise Stores, etc. are entered.

[0024] E. In excess, we explain the ~~An~~ operating procedure of the Franchise Business System 1, concerning the execution, according will now be described in conjunction with ~~to the~~ Fflow Chart of set forth in Fig. 5. The Fflow Chart of Fig. 5 shows the communication between an M.-Server 30 and an H.-Server 10. When you use the System 1 is used, a Member shallcan make its ownan M.-Server 30 (e.g., a personal computer, PC) connect via thea service provider using a the phone cable first (Step S1). Then, software such as an in order to activate Internet Browser, can be activated (Step S2). Then, the accessing Member shallcan input thea URL, obtained in advance, to access the System 1 concerned (Step S3).

[0025] The present invention envisions ~~In such a case, there are two kinds of URLs. A first kind of URL --- the one is --- common into the whole system. --- and the other is~~ The second kind of URLs are classified according to by each Franchise Store. For example, a second kind of URL could take the general formlet's look at the http://www.abc.xyz.co.jp, -which can beis for theone of the Franchise Stores. The part of-"abc" of the URL identifies the FranchiseMember Store, -while- The URL without the part "abc" iscan be the first type URL used commonly in the whole System 1. In any case, the accessing Member shall be connected with H.-Server 10 by the "xyz.co.jp" portion of the

URL (Step S4). At that time, H.-Server 10 ~~shall~~ can judge whether the access is the first or the second one and so on, by confirming the Terminal ID Code ~~added~~ provided to the H.-Server 10 in the Member's first access from M.-Server 30 (Step S5). If it is the first access by the Member,

a Member ID No. and a Password are requested to be added. The H.-Server 10 ~~shall~~ can recognize whether the access is from the Member or not, by comparing such input data with the Member's Data cataloged in Member's Data Base 13: (Step S6, S7).

[0026] F.—In the ~~at~~ above ~~s~~Steps S6 and S7, the above Member ID No. and Password had been obtained ~~by~~ from the Members when they Member applied for the entry at the Franchise Store, and such data ~~can be~~ had been cataloged in Member Data Base 13 of H. Server 10, based on the notice from the Franchise Store. When such an Member ID No. or Password is different from what has been cataloged, or when there is no input ~~from an~~ accessing Member, H.-Server 10 judges that the access is from a non-mMembers and displays the Hhome Ppage for guests —(Step S8). However, when the H.-Server judges that the input Member ID No. and Password are what has already been entered, and that the access from M. Server 30 is the second one (-or third, fourth one), the H.-Server 10

~~has to decide~~ determines whether or not the ~~above~~ URL entered by the accessing Member is the ~~specific to one for each of the~~ FranchiseMember Stores. (Step S9). For example, referring to the specific URL example above, if there is not an "abc" part in the input URL and/or it is ~~imnot~~ not possible to specify the ~~Member~~ Franchise Store by the URL, then, —the H.-Server 10 ~~demand~~ requests the accessing MemberClient 30 to again to input data for identifying the Membership, based on Member Data Base 13, in order to recognize to which MemberFranchise Store, the accessing Member who has ~~accessed~~, belongs: (Step S10).

[0027] G.—~~Thus, Once a having confirmed the Membership and FranchiseMember Store have been confirmed~~, H.-Server 10 ~~shall~~ next reads the Hhome Ppage Ddata for Sstore Nname Llogo and Ffigures, as shown in Fig.: 4 for example, from Home Page Data Base 15 for Home Page. Then, ~~it~~ the H.-Server 10 shall can create a Hhome Ppage for the FranchiseMember Store concerned, using the ~~Data and Mmerchandise Ddata~~ read out from Goods Master Database 11 and various contents ~~12—12~~, and ~~shall~~ can send the resulting Hhome Ppage to the accessing -M.-Server 30 (Step S11). Moreover, ~~it~~ the H.-Server 10 shall can also obtain the Ppurchase Oorder Ddata including the Member's ID

No., ordered goods, delivery ~~way~~method, and ~~payment method~~how to receive the money, when M.-Server **30** has processed a purchase order: (Step S12). In this way, when the order from a Member

belonging to a Franchise Store has been received and processed, H.-Server **10** ~~shall~~can transfer the received order data to the appropriate F.-Server **20** via network **40** (e.g., the Internet), including by eE-mails.

[0028] ~~H.-The FranchiseMember Store~~, which has received order data from H.Server **10**~~it~~, ~~shall~~can deliver the goods and receive the ~~money~~payment according to the transferred order data, after having contacted ~~directly~~the Member ordering directly~~concerned~~. ~~In such a case, if the Franchise Store has no stock of ordered goods, the Franchise Store is~~can be able to get the~~such~~ goods concerned from the Headquarter or by way of ~~through there the Headquarter~~. In this way, The EC electronic commerce using such Home Pages on the Internet is~~can be undertaken executed in that way~~.

[0029] In the System **1** described, each ~~MemberFranchise~~ Store does not need to create/maintain/control its own Home Page, ~~but at the same time and~~ is able to show the customized Home Page to its members. Moreover, each Franchise Store can supply many kinds of goods information, not only for its own stocked items, but also for other goods based on the huge scale of data ~~in~~at a Headquarters.

[0030] ~~I. Basically, in the particular embodiment~~execution form mentioned described above; each ~~FranchiseMember~~ Store ~~could~~shall be identified by the URL sent from an M.-Server **30**. It is also possible for each Franchise Store ~~to set the section to identify the Franchise Store in its~~according to a section of the Member's ID No. and/or Ppassword so that H.-Server **10** may specify the Franchise Store based on the Member's ID No. and/or Ppassword. Besides ~~transferring the received order data to the~~ Franchise Store via the Internet, such data may also be sent by documents or in other transfer ways. ~~The~~In basic form, a System according to the present invention can~~way is to create the customized Home Page for each Franchise Store, although you the System **1** may operate while omitting the Hhome Ppage creation and operate the System~~.

[0031] With the present invention, as described by a particular embodiment above, an H.-Server **10** ~~shall~~can identify ~~the~~ a Franchise Store to which the Members belong; by the URLs or ID Nos. input by the Members, for example, ~~w~~when the Members collected by

each Franchise Store order some goods; through ~~at~~ the Hhome Ppage created by a Headquarter. Then, such received order data ~~shall~~ can be transmitted to the identified Franchise Store. Therefore, the Franchise Store is able to execute ~~Eee~~ electronic commerce ~~withover the~~ Internet; by delivering the goods to the Member concerned and receiving the money from the Member according to the order data, even if the Franchise Store does not have its own Hhome Ppage. ~~Especially,~~ In such an arrangement, such a Franchise Store is able to present use a huge volume of goods data ~~and~~ including goods in stock owned by the Headquarters.

[0032] Also, when any procedures related ~~with~~ to copy-rights of records/CDs are required, the Headquarters can perform such procedures ~~shall do it~~ for the ~~Member~~ Franchise Store, and each Franchise Store ~~will~~ can enjoy executing electronic commerce ~~EC~~ efficiently at low costs. When a Member belonging to a Franchise Store has accessed an H.-Server via Internet, ~~at~~ the customized Hhome Ppage ~~is~~ can be displayed to the Member and ~~the Member~~ he/she feels as if ~~he/she~~ they ~~were~~ was trading directly with the Franchise Store ~~to which he/she belongs~~, without awareness of the Headquarter.

[0033] Consequently, according to the present invention, ~~at~~ the Franchise Store ~~concerned~~ is able to ~~appeal~~ promote its existence more efficiently and to promote its sales activity.

~~WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:~~

~~[Claim 1] All Record retailers shall get together and organize a Franchise System, in order to establish the Headquarter for Internet business. Also, the Headquarter will set up the servers for Internet (hereafter, referred to as "H.Server"). Both Franchise Stores and the Members collected by Franchise Stores individually will have each server (hereafter, referred to as "F.Server" and "M.Server respectively) connected with H. Server via Internet. The proposal is the "H. Server" to consist of the following data and systems:~~

~~a. Merchandise Information Memory Data, will be gathering information of various goods (hereafter, referred to as "Goods") including records, CD, MD, Music Tape, Video Tape and DVD, etc. which are sold by Franchise Stores;~~

~~b. Home Page Creation System, will be realized through several ways: the system will be able to read the Merchandise Information Memory Data and get all the necessary merchandise information. At the same time, it will be able, through each Store's Home page Data Memory System, to collect each Store's Home Page Data, as well as the Franchise Store ID System.~~

~~c. Home Page Sending Service, will be used in order to send the Home Page, including information, gathered from Merchandise Information Memory Data.~~

~~d. Order Receiving System, will facilitate the realization of orders from the Members, through the Home Page.~~

~~e. Received Data Transfer System, will enable the transfer of the Order Data (received by the Order Receiving System), to the "F. Server" identified by Member Store ID System. The order data will be including the buyer's name and the ordered items.~~

~~f. Franchise Store ID System will facilitate the identification of a franchise store to which the Members concerned belong, with the time that Members or non-Members~~

have accessed. The System shall identify the Franchise Store to which the Member concerned belong, based on the URL set up in advance according to the defined rules.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 — Configuration chart of Hardware associated with the execution form of the Invention.

Fig. 2 — Configuration chart of the Member Data Base used in the System.

Fig. 3 — Configuration chart of Franchise Store Data Base.

Fig. 4 — Configuration chart of Home Page Data Base for every Franchise store.

Fig. 5 — Description chart of an example of Front Page in Home Page created by the System.

<Meaning of Symbols>

(10) Headquarter Server, (11) Goods Data Base, (13) Member Data Base, (14) Franchise

Data Base, (15) Data Base for Home Page Data, (20) Franchise Store's Server, (30)

Member's Server, (40) Internet

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

~~To provide such a~~ A System (1) in which EC provides electronic commerce for franchise stores is available by over the Internet, without such franchise stores creating/maintaining/controlling at their own Hhome Ppages and by reducing the transaction costs of for goods soldeontrol.

~~Make the connection between~~ The System (1) may include a headquarter Sserver (H.Server) (10) used by the Headquarter enlisting that is connected to Ffranchise Sstore servers (F.Server) (20) and Clientmember Sservers (30), used by the Mmembers collected by Ffranchise Sstores, available through via Internet (40). Moreover, the H.Server (10) can is equipped with the functions to store Mmerchandise (goods) Hinformation, goods inventory piling up goods data, to inform Ffranchise Sstores when their Mmembers have accessed, and to receive orders from Members or non-Members placed through the Hhome Ppage corresponding to particular franchise stores.

APPENDIX B

Clean version of substitute Specification

For Serial No.: 09/608,038
Applicant(s): YOSHIOKA, Tetsuro

Network Based Franchise Business System and Method

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates generally to systems and methods of electronic commerce, and more particularly to an electronic shopping system and method for retail franchisees over a network such as the Internet.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Recently, companies and stores in various industries create virtual stores by way of their own conventional home pages on the Internet. Through such conventional home page arrangements, the companies/stores receive purchase orders.

[0003] In this type of conventional electronic shopping system, it is very important to create home pages which will be attractive to common consumers and that will be able to stimulate consumers' purchasing desires. Furthermore, it is desirable to present a variety of goods, enough to satisfy the high and different demands of the consumers.

[0004] Unfortunately, the relative cost required to create and maintain effective home pages can be much higher for medium/small sized enterprises or retail shops, than for large sized companies. The introduction of systems for presenting/providing individual home pages for medium/small sized enterprises may not be adequately effective, since the range of the goods to be displayed is limited. Thus, even if a medium/small sized

enterprise decides to start an electronic commerce system on their own, it may be difficult to obtain satisfactory effects.

[0005] In light of the above, it would be desirable to arrive at a practical franchise system for retailers, such as music record retailers.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] According to the present invention, retailers, such as music record retailers, can be organized together under a Franchise System that establishes a headquarter for electronic commerce, such as Internet business. Such a headquarter can include a headquarter server (hereafter referred to as "H.Server"). Retailer members (e.g., franchise stores) may each have their own server (hereafter referred to F.Server) connected to the H.Server via a network (e.g., the Internet). Members (e.g., potential consumers) collected by franchise stores individually can each have their own server (hereafter referred to as "M.Server") also connected with H.Server via the network (e.g., Internet).

[0007] According to the present invention, an H.Server can include the following data and systems:

[0008] Merchandise Information Memory Data, that includes gathered information for various goods (hereafter, referred to as "Goods") sold by Franchise Stores, such as records, CD, MD, Music Tape, Video Tape and DVD, etc.;

[0009] a Home Page Creation System, that can be realized through several ways and can read the Merchandise Information Memory Data for desired merchandise information, while at the same time collecting each home page data and Franchise Store Identification (ID) data through a Franchise Store's Home page Data Memory System particular to each Franchise Store;

[0010] a Home Page Sending Service, that sends information gathered from Merchandise Information Memory Data to the various Franchise Store home pages;

[0011] an Order Receiving System that facilitates ordering by Members through the

various Franchise Store home pages;

[0012] a Received Data Transfer System that transfers order data (received by the Order Receiving System) to the “F.Server” identified by a Member Store ID System, such order data can include a buyer’s name and the ordered items; and

[0013] a Franchise Store (identification) ID System that facilitates the identification of the Franchise Store to which a Member (or non-Member) belongs, including the time(s) that the Members or non-Members have accessed, the Franchise Store ID System identifying the Franchise Store to which a Member belongs based on a uniform resource locator (URL) set up in advance according to predefined rules.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a system according one embodiment of the present invention, including associated hardware.

[0015] Fig. 2 is a diagram showing one example of a Member Data Base of a system according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0016] Fig. 3 is a diagram showing one example of a Franchise Store Data Base of a system according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0017] Fig. 4 is a diagram showing a Home Page Data Base of a system according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0018] Fig. 5 is a flow diagram showing a method according to of a system according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0019] Fig. 1 shows the structure outline of electronic shopping system (hereinafter System 1) according to one embodiment of the present invention. The System 1 includes a headquarter server (H.Server) 10 owned by a headquarter of a Franchise

System, franchise servers (F.Server) **20** (only one of which is shown in Fig. 1), owned by one of many Franchise Stores of the Franchise System, member servers (M.Server) **30** (only one of which is shown in Fig. 1) owned by the Members associated with the Franchise Stores, and a network (e.g., Internet) **40** connecting all of them.

[0020] H.Server **10** can be equipped with various databases. Among the databases is a Goods Master Data Base **11**, in which merchandise data, such as records/CDs/other goods related with the System, are cataloged. H.Server **10** may also be equipped with contents **12** which classify goods entered into Goods Master Data Base **11**. Such classification can include, for example, a musician group, a music category group and a best sellers group, etc.

[0021] H. Server **10** is further be equipped with a Member Entry Data Base **13** where members collected by each Franchise Store in the Franchise System are cataloged. One example of a portion of a Member Entry Data Base is shown in Fig. 2, and designated by the general reference character **13**. A Member Entry Data Base **13** can include, for every member, an identification (ID) Number (No.), a password, a Franchise Store code, a Branch Code (if the member belongs to a certain branch of a Franchise Store), and a terminal identification (ID) Code, also called a “cookie”, which is used by an H.Server **10** to identify if a member’s M.Server **30** has been entered into the Member Entry Data Base **13**.

[0022] H.Server **10** also includes a Franchise Store Data Base **14** which can include Franchise Store entries. One example of a portion of a Franchise Store Data Base is shown in Fig. 3, and designated by the general reference character **14**. Data for every Franchise Store can be entered into the Franchise Store Data Base **14**, including a store code and branch code (if any). When a franchise agreement has been made between a store and the Headquarter, data for the store is cataloged in Franchise Store Data Base **14** of H.Server **10**, to make such a store a Franchise Store of the System **1**.

[0023] H.Server **10** may also include a Home Page Data Base **15** in which the home page data of each Franchise Store can be entered. As shown in Fig. 4, for example, the home page data can include store name logos used in creating a home page, figures for the home pages, and a branch list for a Franchise Store, etc.

[0024] An operating procedure of the System 1 will now be described in conjunction with a flow chart set forth in Fig. 5. The flow chart of Fig. 5 shows communication between an M.Server 30 and an H.Server 10. When the System 1 is used, a member can make an M.Server 30 (e.g., a personal computer, PC) connect via a service provider using a phone cable first (Step S1). Then, software such as an Internet browser, can be activated (Step S2). Then, the accessing Member can input a URL, obtained in advance, to access the System 1 (Step S3).

[0025] The present invention envisions two kinds of URLs. A first kind of URL is common to the whole system. The second kind of URLs are classified according to each Franchise Store. For example, a second kind of URL could take the general form <http://www.abc.xyz.co.jp>, which can be for one of the Franchise Stores. The part "abc" of the URL identifies the Franchise Store. The URL without the part "abc" can be the first type URL used commonly in the whole System 1. In any case, the accessing Member shall be connected with H.Server 10 by the "xyz.co.jp" portion of the URL (Step S4). At that time, H.Server 10 can judge whether the access is the first or the second one and so on, by confirming the Terminal ID Code provided to the H.Server 10 in a Member's first access from M.Server 30 (Step S5). If it is the first access by the Member, a Member ID No. and a Password are requested to be added. The H.Server 10 can recognize whether the access is from the Member or not, by comparing such input data with the Member's Data cataloged in Member's Data Base 13 (Step S6, S7).

[0026] In the above Steps S6 and S7, the above Member ID No. and Password had been obtained from the Member when the Member applied for entry at the Franchise Store, and such data can be cataloged in Member Data Base 13 of H.Server 10, based on the notice from the Franchise Store. When such a Member ID No. or Password is different from what has been cataloged, or when there is no input from an accessing Member, H.Server 10 judges that the access is from a non-Member and displays a home page for guests (Step S8). However, when the H.Server judges that the input Member ID No. and Password are what has already been entered, and that the access from M. Server 30 is the second one (or third, fourth one), the H.Server 10 determines whether or not the URL entered by the accessing Member is specific to one of the Franchise Stores. (Step S9). For example, referring to the specific URL example above, if there is not an "abc" part in the input URL and/or it is not possible to specify a Franchise Store by the URL, then, the H.Server 10 requests the accessing Member 30 to again input data for

identifying the Membership, based on Member Data Base 13, in order to recognize to which Franchise Store, the accessing Member belongs (Step S10).

[0027] Once a Membership and Franchise Store have been confirmed, H.Server 10 next reads the home page data for store name logo and figures, as shown in Fig. 4 for example, from Home Page Data Base 15. Then, the H.Server 10 can create a home page for the Franchise Store concerned, using the merchandise data read out from Goods Master Database 11 and various contents 12, and can send the resulting home page to the accessing M.Server 30 (Step S11). Moreover, the H.Server 10 can also obtain the purchase order data including the Member's ID No., ordered goods, delivery method, and payment method, when M.Server 30 has processed a purchase order (Step S12). In this way, when the order from a Member belonging to a Franchise Store has been received and processed, H.Server 10 can transfer the received order data to the appropriate F.Server 20 via network 40 (e.g., the Internet), including by e-mail.

[0028] The Franchise Store which has received order data from H.Server 10, can deliver the goods and receive payment according to the transferred order data, after having contacted the Member ordering directly. If the Franchise Store has no stock of ordered goods, the Franchise Store can get such good concerned from the Headquarter or by way of the Headquarter. In this way, electronic commerce using such Home Pages on the Internet can be undertaken.

[0029] In the System 1 described, each Franchise Store does not need to create/maintain/control its own Home Page, but at the same time is able to show the customized Home Page to its members. Moreover, each Franchise Store can supply many kinds of goods information, not only for its own stocked items, but also for other goods based on the huge scale of data at a Headquarters.

[0030] In the particular embodiment described above, each Franchise Store could be identified by the URL sent from an M.Server 30. It is also possible for each Franchise Store to identify the Franchise Store according to a section of the Member's ID No. and/or password so that H.Server 10 may specify the Franchise Store based on the Member's ID No. and/or password. Besides transferring the received order data to a Franchise Store via the Internet, such data may also be sent by documents or in other transfer ways. In basic form, a System according to the present invention can create a

customized Home Page for each Franchise Store, although the System 1 may operate while omitting home page creation.

[0031] With the present invention, as described by a particular embodiment above, an H.Server 10 can identify a Franchise Store to which Members belong by URLs or ID Nos. input by Members, for example, when the Members collected by each Franchise Store order some goods through a home page created by a Headquarter. Then, such received order data can be transmitted to the identified Franchise Store. Therefore, the Franchise Store is able to execute electronic commerce over the Internet by delivering the goods to the Member concerned and receiving money from the Member according to the order data, even if the Franchise Store does not have its own home page. In such an arrangement, such a Franchise Store is able to present a huge volume of goods data including goods in stock owned by the Headquarters.

[0032] Also, when any procedures related to copyrights of records/CDs are required, the Headquarters can perform such procedures for the Franchise Store, and each Franchise Store can enjoy executing electronic commerce efficiently at low costs. When a Member belonging to a Franchise Store has accessed an H.Server via Internet, a customized home page can be displayed to the Member and the Member feels as if they were trading directly with the Franchise Store, without awareness of the Headquarter.

[0033] Consequently, according to the present invention, a Franchise Store is able to promote its existence more efficiently and to promote its sales activity.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A System (1) provides electronic commerce for franchise stores over the Internet without such franchise stores creating/maintaining/controlling their own home pages and by reducing the transaction cost for goods sold. The System (1) may include a headquarter server (H.Server) (10) that is connected to franchise store servers (F.Server) (20) and member servers (30), used by members collected by franchise stores, via Internet (40). Moreover, the H.Server (10) can store merchandise (goods) information, goods inventory data, inform franchise stores when their members have accessed, and receive orders from Members or non-Members placed through home page corresponding to particular franchise stores.

APPENDIX C

Clean version of amended claims

For Serial No.: 09/608,038
Applicant(s): YOSHIOKA, Tetsuro

1. (Currently Amended) A franchise system for organizing and establishing a headquarter for business transactions over a network, comprising:

- at least one headquarter network server;

- a plurality of franchise store servers, each corresponding to a different franchise store and connected with the at least one headquarter network server by a network; and

- a plurality of member servers, each corresponding to a different member terminal and connected with the at least one headquarter network server by the network; wherein

 - the at least one headquarter network server includes,

 - a merchandise information memory data that includes information for goods sold by the franchise stores,

 - a home page creation system that accesses the merchandise information memory data for merchandise information to create a home page of each franchise store, and that accesses a home page data memory system to collect additional home page data for the home page of each franchise store, the home page creation system also accessing a franchise store identification (ID) system,

 - a home page sending service that sends home page data for the home page of each franchise store to at least one predetermined member server, including information from the merchandise information memory data,

 - an order receiving system that processes orders from the plurality of member terminals through the home pages of each franchise store,

 - a received data transfer system that transfers order data received by the order receiving system from the at least one headquarter network server to one of the franchise servers according to the franchise store ID system, the order data including a buyer name and goods ordered, and

 - the franchise store ID system matches a franchise store to a person ordering via a member terminal when the person accesses the franchise system, the franchise store ID system matching franchise stores to the person accessing the franchise system based on uniform resource locator values set up in advance according to predetermined rules.

2. (New) The franchise system of claim 1, wherein:

the merchandise information memory data further includes information for goods not available at one of the franchise stores, but available at the headquarter.

3. (New) The franchise system of claim 1, wherein:

the network includes the Internet.

4. (New) The franchise system of claim 1, wherein:

the home page sending service sends predetermined guest home page data when a member server accessing the Franchise System does not match any franchise store.

5. (New) The franchise system of claim 1, wherein:

the uniform resource locator values include a first portion unique to each franchise store and a second portion common to all franchise stores and the headquarters.

6. (New) The franchise system of claim 1, wherein:

the at least one headquarter network server further includes a member entry data base that identifies previously accessing members and matches said members to a predetermined franchise store according to said member entry data.

7. (New) The franchise system of claim 6, wherein:

the member entry data base includes member entries comprising a member identification (ID) value, a password, a franchise store code, and a terminal identification (ID) code.

8. (New) The franchise system of claim 7, wherein:

at least a portion of the member ID value includes at least a portion of the

store code.

9. (New) The franchise system of claim 6, wherein:

at least a portion of the password includes at least a portion of the store code.